Fish Report No. 5:

King Salmon—Halibut—Dungeness Crab—Tanner and King Crab—New Owners at Hoonah Cold Storage and Pelican Cold Storage—Point Adolphus Seafoods—Processing Seafood at Gustavus—Sea Otters Recolonize— Tenders—Leslie Hillman

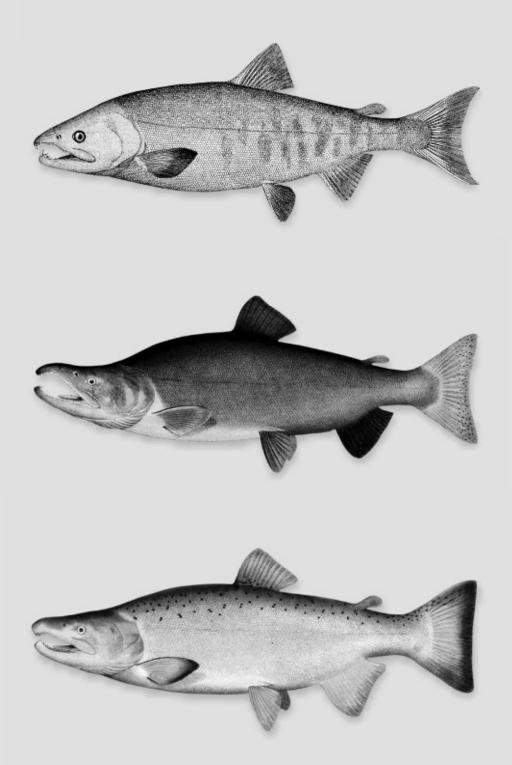






Figure 25: Skiff fisherman Paul Barnes landing halibut in the mouth of Glacier Bay. (courtesy James Mackovjak)

The commercial fishing industry in Glacier Bay grew rapidly while Mike Tollefson was superintendent. The growth was mostly due to three factors: Gustavus was growing; halibut, salmon, and Dungeness and Tanner crab were becoming more valuable; and the NPS—reluctant to enforce unpopular regulations—had what some in the Service later termed an "open door" policy toward commercial fishermen. 415

In Southeast Alaska as a whole, commercial fishing in 1984 accounted for ten percent of the total and forty percent of the private basic income. HHH 416

On a somber note, the worldwide catch of marine fish peaked in 1989, at 86 million metric tons. 417 The principal cause of the decline that followed was overfishing. Though overfishing was not an issue in Glacier Bay, the decline in the world's fisheries spurred public interest and support for the establishment of no-take zones. Glacier Bay National Park would become a prime candidate.

King Salmon

The salmon trolling effort in Glacier Bay also increased during the 1980s, but it was concentrated in the fall, after the visitors and whales had mostly left. It had become widely known that king salmon were often relatively plentiful in Glacier Bay in early October. There weren't a huge number of fish to be caught, but with all other Alaska salmon fisheries closed, there was little competition in the fresh fish market, so the price paid to fishermen was usually fairly high.

A few dozen vessels from throughout the region came to participate in the fishery (at least for the first few days of the season), where they spread themselves out from Bartlett Cove to Russell Island to Muir Inlet. The fishing was usually best when the season first opened (October 1), and good fishing lasted a couple of weeks at most. Then the fish seemed to move on. During this period, a total of perhaps 1,000 to 2,000 king salmon were caught. A catch of even five fish per day for an individual boat was usually considered worthwhile.

Overall though, the October troll effort wasn't generally something that would make a fisherman's season. It was more a financial shot in the arm before winter set in. There was as well a mental health component to the fishery: it provided an opportunity for fishermen to get out of the house during the off season. It must be noted that efforts later in the season sometimes yielded large catches.

Halibut

The halibut fishery in Glacier Bay began to grow rapidly around 1980. Statewide, the number of vessels fishing halibut had begun to increase rapidly beginning in the mid-1970s

The halibut fishery in Alaska was during those years managed on an area quota system, with the length of the season based on how long International Pacific Halibut Commission (IPHC) fishery managers estimate it would take the halibut fleet to catch the quota (see Figure 25). III For a number of years prior

HHH Private basic income is that generated in private industries that produce goods or services for export, such as commercial fishing, the manufacture of forest products, and mining.

III Glacier Bay is in Area 2C, which comprises most of southeast Alaska.

to 1976, the season began in early May and ended in September. As the fleet grew, the length of the season declined proportionately. Most who fished halibut participated in other fisheries and fished halibut to supplement their income. 418 Others were "hobbyists" who fished part-time from sport boats. Professional halibut fishermen—"halibut heads"—were a dying breed.

By 1980 the halibut fleet was overcapitalized and inefficient. Short, intense "halibut derbies," sometimes only 24 hours long, made for hit-or-miss fishing and led to production bottlenecks at processing plants that affected the quality and price of halibut. They were also dangerous: regulators would not cancel a season because of bad weather, and the competitive nature of the fishery led some physically exhausted crews to continue fishing.

On the first day of the 3-day 1984 halibut season (May 22-24) an NPS aerial survey of Glacier Bay proper counted fully 70 halibut vessels. JJJ 419 Many were not in Glacier Bay because it was their preferred place to fish, but because the halibut grounds elsewhere were crowded. This crowding forced much of the effort into marginal areas.

The possibility that there might be a high density of halibut vessels in Glacier Bay during whale season caused concern about adverse impacts on humpback whales. Following the 1984 season, Superintendent Tollefson requested that the National Marine Fisheries Service (NMFS) work with the International Pacific Halibut Commission (IPHC) to close Glacier Bay proper to halibut fishing during whale season. The NMFS and IPHC expressed sympathy with the NPS, but explained that halibut seasons were normally set to accommodate fishermen and processors. They declined to adjust the season to accommodate the NPS's concerns. The situation overall was worsening. In response to this problem, the federal government's National Marine Fisheries Service (NMFS) designed an individual fisherman's quota (IFQ) program that, when implemented in 1995, substantially improved the fishery in almost every respect. As it worked out, the number of halibut vessels in Glacier Bay during whale season subsequently decreased to a level that allowed the NPS to determine that limiting halibut vessels was not necessary.420

Dungeness Crab

Despite the fact that the Beardslee Island area had in 1980 been designated as wilderness and seemed likely to be closed to commercial fishing, the Dungeness crab fishing effort there was steadily increasing during the 1980s and becoming more sophisticated. In 1983, Charlie Clements upgraded from the 38-foot Rust Bucket to the Bogart, a 22-foot heavy-duty outboard-powered aluminum skiff. The same year Tom Traibush got a bigger engine and a hydraulic puller for the Fat Man, and increased the number of pots he was running to 90. In 1984 Otto and Christina Florschutz purchased Duke Rothwell's Dungeness crab fishing operation, including the venerable Adeline. As part of the sale agreement, Rothwell was contracted to fish with the Florschutzes for a several months to teach them some of what he knew of the Glacier Bay area. Like Traibush and Clements, the Florschutzes would join the top tier of Dungeness crab fishermen in Southeast Alaska.

Traibush worked hard and fishing was good. In 1986, fishing from the Fat Man—an open skiff—and running a full string of 300 pots, he caught more than 40,000 pounds of Dungeness crab. The following spring, he purchased the Nellie Brown, a 34-foot dieselpowered fiberglass-hulled lobster boat that the Forest Service had surplused. As well as Dungeness crab, Traibush fished halibut. During the first halibut opening in 1987, he caught a disappointing 1,600 pounds. For the second opening, he set a lot of gear in the right place and caught 13,000 pounds. At one point, Traibush had so much halibut aboard the *Nellie Brown* that it began to take on water. The ex-vessel price for halibut that opening was about \$1.25 per pound, which meant Traibush had pretty much paid for his boat. And the Dungeness crab season had not yet begun. Traibush landed 73,000 pounds of Dungeness crab that year. His entire crab catch was from Glacier Bay, mostly from the Beardslees. 421

Traibush leased the *Fat Man* to his deckhand, who also fished Dungeness crab. In late July 1988, the *Fat Man* sank near Kidney Island Reef in the Beardslee Islands. The boat had been overloaded with crab pots, and, because a lot of the weight was in the bow, it was also poorly trimmed and pushing a big bow wave. This dangerous situation became life-threatening when the outboard

^{JJJ} A May halibut season would tend to attract a high number of fishermen. The weather is usually good, and other seasons, such as trolling, crabbing, seining and gillnetting, have not yet started.

motor suddenly quit, causing the boat's bow to plunge into the wave. Water poured into the open boat, and it quickly sank. Luckily, the vessel was close to shore, and both aboard escaped unharmed. The *Fat Man* rests today where it sank.

In 1989 Charlie Clements upgraded to the *Heron*, a gasoline-powered 26-foot fiberglass-hulled lobster boat. He sold the *Bogart* to Tom Traibush, who planned to use the vessel to tender his own halibut.

Park rangers counted 206 Dungeness crab pots that were being fished by four local fishermen in the Beardslee Islands in 1984. An undetermined number of pots were located in other parts of Glacier Bay. In 1986 rangers counted 493 pots in the Beardslee Islands, and an additional 239 in other parts of Glacier Bay. By 1987 the number of Dungeness crab pots in the Beardslee Islands had increased to 867, with an additional 358 in other locations in lower Glacier Bay. KKK A total of eight fishermen fished that year in lower Glacier Bay, three of whom were from out-of-state. The effort would continue to increase.

Tanner and King Crab

Alaska's Tanner crab fishery grew to meet strong Japanese demand for frozen crab sections. Unfortunately, overfishing during the 1980s from Prince William Sound westward caused Tanner crab stocks to fail.^{LLL} The Yakutat area Tanner crab fishery subsequently failed also.⁴²³ A consequence of this unfortunate situation was that Southeast Alaska's Tanner crab became more valuable.

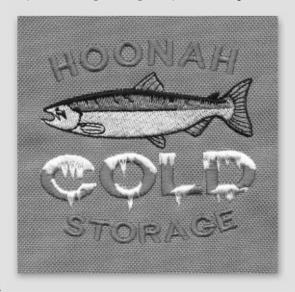
Tanner crab fishing in Southeast Alaska is confined to the winter, so in Glacier Bay it did not conflict with visitors or whales. Five vessels fished Tanner crab in Glacier Bay in 1986. 424 By 1987, some small vessels—mostly from Gustavus—were fishing Tanner crab in Glacier Bay by using "ring nets." "Hoopers," as they called themselves, were not subject to limited entry restrictions, but were limited to 20 ring nets. A ring net is a fairly heavy steel circular frame around which nylon mesh is stretched. A bridle of three lines fastened to the frame at equidistant intervals leads to a buoyline and marker buoy. Bait, usually salmon or codfish, is secured in the middle of the net, which is set on the ocean bottom. Periodically the gear is quickly brought to the surface with

a hydraulic puller. Water pressure pins crab to the mesh during the retrieval. Ring net fishing is not practical in waters deeper than about 40 fathoms. Because the currents are not strong and the waters somewhat protected, the Beardslee Islands were very popular among ring net fishermen. Though the Tanner crab ring net fishery wasn't a "big money" fishery, it was important financially for a handful of fishermen in Gustavus during a traditionally very lean time of the year. Almost any vessel equipped with a hydraulic puller was suitable for fishing with ring nets.

Glacier Bay's king crab fishery remained small, with the species caught mostly incidental to the Tanner crab fishery. Average annual harvest in Glacier Bay proper during the years 1976 to 1995 was 4,900 pounds of red/blue king crab, and 1,100 pounds of golden king crab. 425 In 1984, the state's Commercial Fisheries Entry Commission capped the number of fishermen allowed to participate in Southeast Alaska's king crab fishery.

New Owners at Hoonah Cold Storage and Pelican Cold Storage

Thompson Fish Co.'s frozen fish were marketed by Bill Dignon, of Seattle. Mike Thompson died unexpectedly in 1984, and the operation was purchased by Dignon two years later. Dignon expanded the operation (including an approximate doubling of freezing capacity, to 70,000 pounds per day) and changed



its name to Hoonah Cold Storage (see Figure 26). The business focused on the production of troll-caught salmon for the European market,

Figure 26: Logo of Hoonah Cold Storage in Hoonah. (courtesy James Mackovjak)

KKK Tom Traibush later told the author that rangers failed to see many buoys.

LLL Some Tanner crab areas have not yet reopened.



Figure 27: Founders of Point Adolphus Seafoods in Gustavus, James and Annie Mackovjak (courtesy Deb Woodruff)

but also processed halibut, Tanner crab and sablefish ("black cod").⁴²⁶ During the 1990s, Hoonah Cold Storage was the largest buyer of halibut and Tanner crab from Glacier Bay.⁴²⁷

Pelican Cold Storage, owned by the Clapp family and managed by Jim Ferguson, grew to become one of the principal fish processing establishments in Southeast Alaska. The plant was capable of freezing 200,000 pounds of fish per day. In 1982, after 13 years at the company's helm, Ferguson retired.⁴²⁸ In 1989, the Clapp family sold the company to Kaioh Suisan, a Japanese firm that had no experience in processing fish.

Point Adolphus Seafoods

By 1984 Icy Passage Fish was purchasing most of the Dungeness crab caught by locals in Glacier Bay. Another business, Point Adolphus Seafoods, was started that same year by a Gustavus resident, Jim Mackovjak (see Figure 27). Mackovjak had considerable experience fishing and working on tenders and in processing plants. His plan was to focus on processing halibut and salmon, and to not compete with Icy Passage Fish for crab. The business didn't work out as planned, and shipping live Dungeness crab soon became the financial backbone of Point Adolphus Seafoods. The company also shipped live Tanner crab and fresh salmon and halibut. Crab shipments ranged up to about 1,000 pounds per day, while shipments of salmon and halibut were sometimes 5,000 pounds or more. A limiting factor was the availability

of air cargo space. Mackovjak figured that his small operation was capable of shipping about 2,000 pounds of fish per day continuously.

Processing Seafood at Gustavus

As a site for processing fish, Gustavus offers little to attract an operation of any size. Though the very high cost of electricity is a factor, the principal reason is the lack of a boat harbor. What Gustavus does have, however, is an airport with—at least in the summer—scheduled Alaska Airlines jet service. With a nearby supply of high-quality seafood, Gustavus is a very good location from which to ship modest quantities of fish by air, particularly to West Coast markets.

Shipping fresh or live seafood can be a financially perilous business (see Figure 28). Alaska Airlines, Southeast Alaska's major carrier, has a lot of experience transporting fish, not all of it good. Leaking crab boxes that originated at Gustavus once damaged the floor of a plane's cargo hold so badly that it had to be replaced. (Crabs are shipped dry, but there is always drainage.) Seafood freight rates are comparatively low, but seafood is also the lowest priority cargo. It is the last to be booked and the first to be bumped. While Alaska Airlines has good connections to West Coast cities, its hub, Seattle, can be a "black hole" for a perishable product. Product eventually finds its way out of the Seattle air freight terminal, but it has been known to take days, which literally destroys fresh seafood. Maintain-

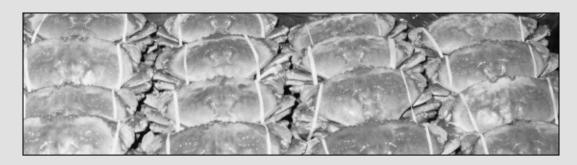


Figure 28: Whole-cooked Dungeness crab packed for shipment by air to market in the Lower-48. (courtesy James Mackovjak)

ing good relations and communications with Alaska Airlines, therefore, has been critical to success. Gustavus some years had the advantage of being the turnaround location for Alaska Airlines northbound flights. This meant that Gustavus shippers received priority in putting cargo on the southbound plane. This was particularly important in the early years when the Boeing 737 planes that Alaska Airlines flew into Gustavus were smaller and had less cargo capacity than the more modern versions now used. Unfortunately, Alaska Airlines' facilities at Gustavus do not include a cooler, and cargo usually sits un-refrigerated for hours before being loaded aboard a plane.

There was a lot of cooperation in Gustavus between fishermen and processors. In a normal port—one with a harbor—fishing vessels would tie to a processor's dock and unload their crab from a "tanked" hold (one into which saltwater is pumped continuously). The crab would be weighed, then placed in live tanks on the docks to await processing. Lacking a harbor, the fishermen in Gustavus improvised. While fishing, they kept their catch on deck in holding containers that ranged from perforated plastic garbage cans to crab pots with the doors wired shut. The crab were periodically doused with seawater. So long as they are kept moist and cool, Dungeness crab can live out of water for days. Fishermen "delivered" Dungeness crab by suspending their holding containers in the water from the dock at Gustavus or, in the fall, from the dock at Bartlett Cove. The processor was then notified, and the crab shipped as the market demanded. Crab were weighed as they were packed for shipment. In the mid-1980s, the Dungeness crab caught in Glacier Bay averaged about 2.4 pounds.

Sea Otters Recolonize

The Cold War nuclear tests at Amchitka Island in Alaska's Aleutian Islands in 1969 had significant ramifications for the Dungeness

crab fishery of Glacier Bay and Icy Strait. Sea otters had been hunted almost to extinction in Southeast Alaska by the Russian-American Co. in the early 19th century, and the planning phase prior to the Amchitka tests provided an opportunity to rescue a number of at-risk sea otters and re-introduce them to Southeast Alaska. Prior to the explosions, ADF&G personnel captured the sea otters and transported them by airplane to Southeast Alaska. With the assistance of the NPS, some were released near Cape Spencer, on Glacier Bay N.M.'s outer coast. The population of sea otters did not grow rapidly for a number of years, but it then exploded. By 1987 large groups were sighted in Icy Strait. Crab are among the sea otter's favorite food: an individual sea otter can consume up to 14 Dungeness crab in a single day. MMM 429 The voracious sea otters were in direct competition with Dungeness crab fishermen. Catches in Icy Strait therefore declined. Dungeness crab fishermen in Glacier Bay were alarmed in the mid-1990s when the first few sea otters were sighted on their fishing grounds. At that time the NPS was working hard to end commercial fishing, and some—though not with the NPS—speculated that the effort might be made moot if sea otters multiplied and decimated the Dungeness crab population first. In 2001, the 1,238 sea otters that were counted in Glacier Bay had not had competition from Dungeness crab fishermen for three years. 430 Perhaps it is still too early to tell if Glacier Bay's crab populations will be dramatically impacted by sea otters, but sport pots set in Bartlett Cove were doing well in 2006.

Tenders

Tenders are vessels that purchase fish on the fishing grounds and transport them to processing facilities. Fish buying is very competitive, and processors utilize tenders to help secure a reliable supply of fish. Tenders also bring an element of efficiency to the industry by allowing

MMM Tanner crab are also preyed upon by sea otters.

fishermen more time on the grounds. In 1983, Glacier Bay Superintendent Mike Tollefson approved at least one tender in Glacier Bay during the halibut season as a means of reducing vessel traffic. 431 At least one and likely more tenders bought halibut in Glacier Bay the following year. 432 Tenders were regularly used to buy halibut in Glacier Bay until the IFQ program for halibut was established. Tenders are not usually used to purchase Dungeness crab, but during the summer of 1985 Icy Passage Fish experienced some financial problems—getting paid for crab that had already been shipped, and for awhile the company couldn't afford to buy crab from Tom Traibush and Charlie Clements. Fishing was good and they were accumulating a considerable quantity of crab. To reduce his inventory, Clements chartered floatplanes to fly loads of crab from the Beardslee Islands to Pelican Cold Storage, about 50 miles by air. Traibush and Clements approached Point Adolphus Seafoods about purchasing the crab. Jim Mackovjak quickly made arrangements with Seaboy Alaska Longline, a seafood company from Sitka, to send its tender, Ranger, to pick up the crab for transport to Juneau. Tollefson approved the tender on a one-time trial basis as a means to limit vessel travel and airplanes landing in the Beardslee Islands. The tender effort worked, but only marginally, and was not tried again.

Leslie Hillman

On April 5, 1985 Leslie Hillman, of Hoonah, perished when his 27-foot fiberglass-hulled cabin cruiser *Judge Two*, on which he was hand trolling for king salmon, struck Drake Island and sank during a snow squall that limited visibility. The vessel was later salvaged. 433

